

competitive intelligence corner

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a monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to CI



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Dear CI Corner: If you were running a CI program, and then decided to leave the company, what advice would you give the person taking over the program?
Internal Client

Dear Internal Client,

Our advice is as follows:

1. *Make A Real Effort To Monitor And Assess Your Non-Traditional Competitor Activity.* Many companies over-collect CI on traditional competitors, yet have little information on non-traditional competitors. Traditional competitors typically have been in business for a number of years, enjoy high customer awareness and have an infrastructure to support a double digit market share. Non-traditional competitors tend to be innovative in product formulation, distributed through unconventional channels and are priced cheaper to draw buyers. A traditional competitor to Coke, for example, is Pepsi, while a non-traditional competitor is private label colas. Most companies who get blind-sided by a non-traditional competitor, have their sales take a beating because they do not have a contingency plan in place to counter this threat.

2. *Cut Back On The Amount Of Time You Spend Looking For Information On The Internet.* Certainly the Internet is a good reference tool, but it is best to assume that your readers will have already done their own searches. The real value in CI is in uncovering information from primary sources, such as industry experts, customers and competitors. These are the sources that your readers will be looking to for answers, insights and new information.

3. *Keep Your Reports Concise.* It's safe to assume that whomever you send your reports to, will invariably be swamped with e-mails, memos, letters and other reports to read. The challenge is to make your report as concise and precise as possible, so that after two minutes of reading, your reader will get a good sense of

the overall picture, before getting distracted with something else.

4. *Don't Be Surprised If Other People's Interest In CI Quickly Dissipates After The First Few Reports You Send Them.* The interest in CI will quickly dissipate unless your readers are getting value from the information you are providing them. That is why we prescribe to the "less is best" rule. In other words, cut down on what you send out, while making every effort to be insightful, meaningful and directional. A real challenge in CI is keeping readers interested, so that CI does not become "the flavour of the month".

5. *Ask Your Readers For Feedback On Your CI Reports And Suggestions On How You May Be Able To Improve Them.* With CI you always have to be raising the bar, otherwise your reports, as per point #4, will appear repetitive and will quickly lose reader attention. The good news is that most suggestions are usually modest and practical, so you do not have to worry about having to make a lot of changes to your reports.

6. *Have A Senior Executive E-mail A Memo To Staff On The Pitfalls Of Leaking Information To Competitors And Steps To Avoid It.* Many companies wrongly rationalize that as long as the information is in the public domain, it is okay to disclose this information, even if they suspect the request is from a competitor. Why give your competitor any information that they can use to their advantage? Minimizing leakage of sensitive information is just as important as gathering intelligence on competitors.

7. *Whomever You Recruit To Help Collect CI, Make Sure They Do Not Give Up Easily.* In other words, you want people who will see the job through, as a very important part of CI is tracking down leads for information. Good detective work requires patience and persistence.

8. *And Do Not Bring Anyone To Your Team Who Views CI As Something To Brag About.*

These are the people who will leak information about the CI they participated in, if it means helping them get promoted or hired by another company.

Test your CIQ by reading the following mini case and then sending us your answer. Two winners will be selected. Each will each get a free copy of the Competitive Intelligence Manual for Marketing Professionals.

You work for a computer company and recently have been given the responsibility of building a CI program. One of your goals is to get more sales reps to participate in collecting CI. Despite assurances from the sales director, you are finding that the reps are either too busy or not interested in helping. You mentioned this to the Sales Director and he says that he will set aside a few minutes for you to address this issue at the national sales meeting scheduled for next month. He then asks you to e-mail him what the three main points of your address will be.

Our question to you is, "What would your three points be? Why these points?"

Please email your response to either lithwick@market-alert.net or enrico@customerforesight.com. Good Luck!

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